

Frederick Hales McIlmoyl & Family

I was born in 1913 near a small town called Apsley in Ontario. In July of that year, when I was three months old, we left for the West and arrived in Southey just in time to take in the Southey Fair. The third Wednesday in July was usually fair day.

I grew up in Southey and started school in 1919 in a building where the Canadian Legion now stands. The second year school was in the basement of the old Lutheran Church and then we moved into the new brick school on the western edge of town.

The year 1924 brought disaster to the town, but a thrill to the hearts of us children. The school burned to the ground. How vividly I remember standing there watching the flames slowly spread from the basement area up through the two lower rooms and gradually into the two upper rooms. Then, with a great crash, the roof fell in and a great shower of sparks went up into the night air.

It was only after the excitement of the fire was over that we learned that Mr. and Mrs. Spence, principal and primary room teachers, had narrowly escaped with their lives. He was painfully burned in his efforts to get his wife out through the flames. Fortunately it was not too serious and he was able to take up his duties as soon as buildings became available.

While we thought we would be out of school for at least a year, our school trustees thought otherwise. In two weeks we were back at school in the basement of the Baptist Church, the basement of the Lutheran Church, the United Church and the upstairs of the town hall.

During this period, I went to school in the United Church and after summer holidays in 1924, the upstairs of the town hall. Finally, when the present red brick school was completed, we moved into it and I completed my education there. I graduated from Grade Twelve in 1931. This was the first Grade Twelve class in Southey. I continued to work on and off with Dad until his death in 1938 and then with my brother Arnold, began to operate the business.

The year 1939 saw the outbreak of war and I enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1940. I went overseas that winter, landing in Glasgow, Scotland on Christmas Day. I spent three years in England, most of the time on anti-aircraft sites throughout southern England, including an eight-month stretch as defence of a Spitfire Air Drome on the outskirts of London. In October, 1943, we went to Sicily and moved on into Italy.

In July, 1944, after the Hitler line break-through, our regiment was told to pack away the guns as we had complete control of the air. That did not mean the end of the war for us though. We were told we were now infantry and went into battle as foot

soldiers. We moved up into the Adriatic Sea area towards the north of Italy and began advancing across the flat, low-lying country leading to the Po River. This area is subject to flooding and all rivers were dyked so we were continuously faced with one dyke after another. In the rain and mud of late fall it was anything but pleasant. Casualties were high and I lost many good friends during this time.

On December 15, 1944, I was wounded in action. My left eye was so seriously damaged that it had to be removed. I spent my fifth Christmas overseas in a small hospital on the shore of the Adriatic Sea. It was so close to the water that I could hear the waves lapping up against the shore. I was moved from hospital to hospital until I wound up in the base hospital near Naples. Then I went by hospital ship to England and had a spell in a Canadian Hospital in Birmingham.

I came home to Canada by hospital ship and boarded a hospital train in Halifax for the long trip to Regina. When I reached Regina I was given a thirty-day leave, told that my hospital stay was over and to return for my discharge at the end of my leave.

I got my discharge on May 31, five years to the day from my enlistment. After so long in uniform and being under orders at all times, I found it difficult to adjust to civilian life. Very shortly I signed up again - this time for life. In June I married Grace Berkan who had waited all this time for me to come back.

This time I had no regrets to being "under orders" and have had a very rewarding life since. Grace had been born on the family farm six miles north of Southey. She attended Coynach School and then worked out, in, and near Southey. She went East during the war to work in a munitions factory in Ajax, Ontario until near the end of the war, then she returned to work in Regina. It is interesting to note that she was manufacturing the forty-millimeter shell that I was firing during my time in the anti-aircraft.

She was waiting for me when I landed in Regina and we did the best we could to make up for lost time. I was soon involved in our business again and Grace was busy establishing our home. It seemed "living happily ever after" was not to be our lot. In November, Grace was admitted to the hospital in Southey and Dr. Hutchison had the unfortunate task of informing us that she had T.B. This was a dreaded disease as there was no cure other than bedrest. Fortunately for us, T.B. care was free and Grace was admitted to the Fort San T.B. Clinic in February after spending two months in the Southey Hospital.

The next six years she spent in bed, about three years in Fort San and the rest of the time at home. In 1952, our first son, David, was born. In 1954 Grace became pregnant again and had to return to the San until Jim was born. Although he was born in December, he was kept in a special ward until Grace was discharged in April, 1955. He was four months old when we first had him in our care.

Fortunately this was her last time in the San and we were able to carry on in a normal fashion from then on. I continued on in business through these years and in the last fall of 1955 I helped organize the Credit Union. I became manager and nursed it along through the years until I resigned this position in 1970. During this period, my brother Arnold became ill and it seemed advisable to give up the business and concentrate on the Credit Union. Grace and I both worked on the telephone exchange to supplement our income. Upon the death of the agent, Ruby Hales, in 1964, we took over as agents and operated it until the dial system came into being in 1966.

In 1970, I began work for Southey Motors and worked there until the end of 1977 when I retired. Since then I have become secretary of Centennial Homes, The Health Services Centre and the Southey Development Society. These different areas of work, plus the Senior Citizens Drop In Centre and my work in Sunday school and church are sufficient to keep me out of mischief.

Grace, too, finds plenty to do. She has many hobbies – handwork of various kinds. Besides cooking and looking after the home she takes care of her father who lives with us.

Both of our boys went through the Southey School and then attended University in Regina. David worked at various jobs until receiving his B.A. degree. He is presently working for the Department of Northern Affairs in La Ronge. Jim took two years off from his studies to attend a Bible School in Sweden. He traveled throughout Europe, including a trip to Russia and a trip to Israel. On his return, he obtained work at Dales House in Regina. He continued with his studies until obtaining his B.A. degree. In 1979 he married Wendy Watts of Saskatoon. They make their home in Regina.

We plan to do some traveling during our years of retirement, but have no plans to live anywhere other than Southey. We have had a very worthwhile life here and mean to stay to the end of our days.

*(From: Pioneers and Progress:
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